

NSC BRIEFING
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30 March 1954

ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE

I. Current flare-up underlines serious instability in Near East.

Two main trouble spots:

A. Jordan - Two recent incidents.

1. Bus ambush Scorpion Pass - 17 March.

No evidence Jordan responsible

2. Attack Nahhalin village - 28/29 March.

a. Sharett admits Israeli responsibility.

b. Equipment at scene suggests army operation; attacking
force of 2 companies.

c. Armistice Commission censures Israel; Israel not present.

3. Troop dispositions:

a. Jordan: 11,7000 in West Jordan

b. Israel: 12,000 in central sector. Secret ~~re~~ redeploy-
ment and call-up reserves.

B. Syria

1. Dispute over Jordan River waters promoted Lake Tiberias
shooting.

DIA review(s) completed.

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2. Armistice Commission condemned both sides. Ordered

Syrian civilians from lake. Decision threaten break-down
of armistice machinery.

3. Troop disposition:

a. Syria: 12,000: 1/3 of its troops in southern Syria.

b. Israel: Four brigades, one tank company; strength
approximately 10,000.

C. Egypt - Preoccupied with internal problems; trouble unlikely.

D. United Nations

1. Local armistice machinery breaking down.

2. United Nations unable solve Israel-Arab disputes.

II. Anticipated immediate developments:

A. Arabs

1. Egypt to preoccupied to become involved with Israel.

2. Syria also intensely absorbed but has more belligerent
attitude.

a. Will walk out of Armistice Commission if access to
Lake Tiberias not restored.

b. Will be unyielding on Jordan canal diversion issue.

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3. Jordan - Bitter hatred and fear will keep border tense.
4. Arabs fully aware Israeli military superiority. None will attempt to launch an attack.

B. Israel

1. Premier Sharett, faced with internal problems and war group, will try restrain army and gain Israel's aims by diplomacy.
2. Israel cannot afford attack at present.

III. Long-range prospects for relaxation of cold war dim.

- A. Arabs emotional and bitter. - Israel too hard-pressed economically to make concessions.
- B. Arabs - feel West won't protect them. Unable to wage war, will be tempted turn to terrorism, boycott, and maneuvering with Orbit.
- C. Israel
 1. Annoyed with West and UN
 2. Irritated over Western defense plans.
 3. Also irritated with Orbit.
 4. Frustrations will make Israel difficult deal with on international level.

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5. Will exert pressure, particularly in US.

6. Tougher provocative policy against Arabs will probably
emerge.

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NSC BRIEFING

30 March 1954

THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE

The current flare-up in the Arab-Israeli cold war underlines the seriousness of one of the major causes of instability in the Near East. The two main trouble spots -- Jordan and Syria -- have their own special aspects. Between Jordan and Israel, the smouldering antagonism on that chronically tense border has steadily deepened since the Qibya massacre last October. It has now broken into the open with two serious incidents.

The ambushing on 17 March of an Israeli bus in the Negev desert at Scorpion Pass was followed on 29 March with an attack on the Jordan village of Nahalin, approximately 10 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Israel's Premier Sharett admitted participation of Israeli citizens, but implied no official Israeli responsibility by describing the raid as a "local affair."

The American army attaché from Amman, who visited the scene of the raid, believes that it was planned and executed by Israeli armed forces. He states that the attack had the

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earmarks of a military operation and that the material left behind was identical to Israeli army equipment. Israeli members of the local UN Mixed Armistice Commission did not appear for a meeting called by Commander Hutchinson, who joined the Jordanian members in censuring Israel for the armed attack.

In west Jordan, near the Israeli border, there are 11,700

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Arab Legion troops.

Approximately 12,000 Israeli

troops are located in this center sector.

Handwritten:
The bitter dispute over the waters of the Jordan River is a major irritant between Syria and Israel. It helped to promote the flare-up on 11 March over fishing rights on Lake Tiberias. In subsequent days, heavy fire was exchanged between Israeli gunboats and artillery and Syrian outposts on the shore. The armistice commission condemned both sides, but the local UN chairman, in the hope of preventing future trouble, issued an order prohibiting even traditional Syrian civilian

access to the lake. This decision threatens imminent break-down

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- 2 -

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of the Syrian-Israeli armistice machinery and will cause this border to be plagued with infiltration problems in the future. Syria has approximately 12,000 men, one third of its troops, located in southern Syria. Israel has four brigades and one tank company at approximately 10,000 strength, in its northern sector.

Egypt, with which Israel occasionally clashes on the southern border, is at the moment preoccupied with internal problems. There is no indication at present that any unusual action is likely to occur on this border.

At the same time that local armistice machinery in the area is breaking down, the United Nations has been unable to deal effectively with Arab-Israeli disputes before it

The following developments may be anticipated. Egypt is currently too preoccupied with an internal power struggle to become involved with Israel. Syria, although also involved with its own internal problems, has regularly assumed a more belligerent attitude toward Israel and will almost certainly walk out

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on the local armistice commission if Syrian fishing rights and civilian access to Lake Tiberias are not restored. Syria will also be unyielding on any discussion of Jordan River rights, and trouble can be expected if Israel resumes work on its diversion canal there. In Jordan, bitter hatred mixed with fear will keep the entire border tense and result in sporadic acts of

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violence.



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In Israel, Premier Sharett, faced with complex internal problems, is under pressure from military groups demanding tough treatment of the Arabs. Sharett, although believing in diplomacy and moderate methods to gain Israel's ends, may not be strong enough to hold the line. On 29 March the American military attaché in Israel suggested that government changes are imminent. The incident at Nahhalin let off internal Israeli steam, but Israel lost face internationally. At present, Israel can hardly afford to launch a full-scale attack, and Sharett,

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- 4 -

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as long as he is in power, will try to restrain army groups from taking local action which embarrasses Israel internationally.

Long-range prospects for any relaxation of the cold war between Israel and the Arab states are likewise dim. The dispute is too emotional and bitter for the Arabs to be reasonable, and Israel is too hard pressed economically to make the concessions necessary for peace.

The Arabs, despite some realization that the West is trying to be fair and impartial, feel that their Western friends are unwilling to go far enough to protect them from Israeli aggression. Unable to engage in all-out war, the Arabs will be tempted to turn to senseless terrorism on a private level and, on an official level, to sharp boycotts and increasing maneuvering with the Orbit.

Israel is becoming increasingly annoyed with the West and with the United Nations. It is greatly disturbed over Western defense plans in the area which might strengthen the Arabs. At the same time, Israel is irritated with the Orbit because of antisemitism, restrictive ^{LEM} immigration policies, and lack of

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international support. These frustrations will make Israel increasingly difficult to deal with on an international level and in the United (NATIONS) States?. Dependent on the West, Israel will be forced to a policy of exerting maximum pressure, particularly in the United States, to gain its ends. In the Near East, it may be expected to adopt a rough policy of pressure as a result of inability to succeed with diplomatic maneuverings, and even tougher provocative policy against the Arabs will probably emerge.

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